DIE DUMMSCHTE BAURE HENN DIE DICKSCHTE GRUMBEERE

En Ald Paelzer Schprichwart

GRUMBIERE

By RAYMOND E. HOLLENBACH

"Agriculture needs some considerable attention being paid to it, before the farmer can count on ample and certain returns for his labor." (1) These are the words of a traveler through the foothills of the Blue Mountains in Lehigh County a hundred years ago. If the same traveller passed through the same country today, westward to the Schuylkill he could describe the whole economy of these Pennsylvania German farmers with one word—and then for emphasis repeat it—grumbiere, grumbiere, grumbiere!

We are so accustomed to eating potatoes, seeing potatoes and "talking potatoes" that we forget that they have not always been a part of our Pennsylvania German life. It is hard to believe, but true, that not one out of ten of our ancestors from Switzerland and the Palatinate had ever eaten, or seen, a potato before his or her arrival in Pennsylvania. Our ancestors, like all western civilization, were bread-eaters until the use of the potato became a common habit within the last one hundred years

Although the history of the world is largely a story of the struggle for food necessary for existence, most historians have been so bent on writing about political intrigues and the resulting wars that the origin and discovery of so important a food as the potato was for a time almost forgotten and we still call it the "Irish potato" because Ireland alone of all the countries of Europe adopted the potato as its principal food soon after its discovery and introduction from America. The English-speaking world associates this introduction with Walter Raleigh and the year 1585. The potato, however, was actually found cultivated by the Incas in Peru and was mentioned in Spanish literature as early as 1553. They were cultivated in considerable quantities in Spain before 1573, and from there were slowly introduced into Italy, Austria and the Netherlands. Prejudice and superstition, however, prevented them from being generally accepted as a food in continental Europe until the middle of the 18th Century, and in France they were not used to any considerable extent until after the French Revolution.

In Germany there was a superstition that "the potato caused leprosy." Frederick the Great compelled the peasants of eastern Germany to raise potatoes, but they balked and fed them to the pigs, until the king convinced them that they were harmless by eating potatoes in public on a balcony in Breslau. (2) This was just prior to the Seven Years' War (1756-1763—French and Indian War in America) and the availability of potatoes as food enabled the Prussians to win the war in spite of the Russian and Austrian blockade against grain. Parmentier, an apothecary in the French Army, who was held as a prisoner in eastern Germany, observed this use of the potato, and upon his return to France proved to his nation that the potato was not poisonous, although he was not quite as successful in getting the French to eat it. A German cookbook (3) containing 450 pages, published in 1779, contains one single recipe mentioning the potato—"Erdaepfel Kloesze zu machen."

With this European background one can readily understand why our Pennsylvania German ancestors were not acquainted with the potato until after they settled in Pennsylvania. This also explains why no Pennsylvania German ever uses the name **Kartoffel** for this vegetable, except where he learned it by contact with a late-comer from Germany. The name Kartoffel was not yet generally used when our ancestors left Europe.

Regarding the name of the potato, this is almost as varied as its history. The native of Peru called it **papa** or **pappa.** The Spaniards got their potatoes and sweet potatoes mixed and called it **patata,** after the West Indian word, **batata,** meaning sweet potato. The English word, **potato,** is derived from the Spanish. The Italians compared the appearance of the first potatoes, which were small and ill-shaped, with that of the truffle, a genus of fungi common in Europe, and called them **tartuffoli,** after **tartufo,** the name for the truffle. The French call them **pomme de terre,** or apple of the earth. The Dutch have a similar name, **aard-appel.** The Germans in the 18th Century seem to have preferred the name **Erdapfel,** after the French and the Dutch. David Zeisberger, the Moravian missionary, used **Erdapfel** as the equivalent of potato. The modern German, **Kartoffel,** (4) was derived from the Italian by dissimilation. Our own dialect word, **grumbier,** was derived from **Grundbirne,** or ground pear. The dialect form **grumbiere** is not unknown in Germany, and the Serbians have a word, **krumpir,** very similar to our own. Regarding **Erdapfel,** or rather its dialect form, **aerdappel,** this is now our dialect name for the Jerusalem artichoke, another vegetable which is a native of America.

Although a large group of Pennsylvania German farmers now depend on the potato almost entirely to make a living, they cannot be said to have been pioneers in potato farming. No new varieties originated here and no varieties bear Pennsylvania German names. Even farmers boasting of crops of 400, 500 or more bushels per acre have accomplished nothing new, as this is something that was done in both England and America before 1835. (5) On the other hand, in 1856, a correspondent to the American Agriculturist wrote "I have worked a farm over fifty years, and have cultivated potatoes more or less every year. Fifty years ago little was thought of this root. A row or two were planted on the outside of cornfields, or in some corner of a lot unfit for anything else. Ten to fifteen bushels was a suuply for a family." This seems to have been the general pattern of our Pennsylvania Germans up to the Civil War and in most instances up to the beginning of the present century.

Rupp wrote (6) that the total market crop of potatoes in Berks County in 1838 was 15,200 bushels, that the acreage was 4000 acres and that the average yield was 80 bushels per acre. That was less than ¾ of an acre per farm, and considering the quantity that were fed to the hogs and other animals, it can readily be seen that the population were not great potato eaters. Lehigh and Northampton counties raised even less. The total shipments through Easton (7) in 1833 on the Lehigh Canal, the only outlet before the railroads were built, were 215 bushels!

Old account books before 1860 rarely mention potatoes. These books, no matter what the occupation was of the person that kept them, are full of references to haymaking and the harvest field, but in the score or more books closely examined there are only two or three references where anyone worked in a potato field as much as a day or more. The principal interest lies in the various ways the word for potato was spelled. Adam Scheurer, Whitehall Township, but a native of Berks County, in 1794, wrote it **krumbieren.** Jacob Anthony, Greenwich Township, Berks County, 1822, **gruntbieren.** Jacob Scheurer, Whitehall Township, 1825, "Ihm ein fertel **grundberen** geblanzt un die grundberen ausgemacht, ist $2.00." Jonathan Berk, Greenwich Township, 1841, "Hat sie ein tag **grumberen** gelesen." Johannes Krumm, Heidelberg Township, Lehigh County, 1853, "Sein med hen Ein Tag und ½**krundberen** geblanst."

The farmer today is very particular about his choice of seed potatoes. This was not the case in the days just mentioned and to most farmers there were just three kinds of potatoes—**ess grumbiere, blanz grumbiere** un **sei grumbiere.** The varieties cultivated in colonial days were usually native potatoes which were very small, yellow in color and were called kidney potatoes on account of their shape. About 1770 a variety was introduced in New England called "Bilboa." This was a larger variety but "a lover of Bilboas was said to die in five years." (8) In Pennsylvania these were called Spanish potatoes. They were sharp to taste and had a pungent odor. The first improved varieties were introduced from England and Ireland, but about 1830 American horticultural and agricultural societies began to take an interest in developing improved American varieties. One of the very first American potatoes was the "Mercer," (9) a blue variety which in various stages of purity remained a popular one among Pennsylvania Germans down to a generation ago. "Pink-eye" was long a popular variety and was closely akin to the kidney potatoes mentioned above. "Early Rose" long a popular variety was first exhibited before the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in 1867. Among the odd varieties long popular was a small red potato with a yellowish meat, closely related to the kidney potatoes. It seemed to have had no special name and was usually referred to as "die rode was gehl koche." These were small and the yield was poor, but there were old folks who for many years insisted on planting a row or two because they liked their consistency and their flavor.

(1) **History of Northampton, Lehigh, Monroe, etc.**—I. Daniel Rupp, 1845

(2) **Six Thousand Years of Bread**—H. E. Jacob—New York 1944

(3) **Neues Leipziger Koch-Buch.** Frankfort 1779.

(4) **Kluge's Etymologisches Woerterbuch.** Strassburg 1889.

(5)—**Farmers' Cabinet.** Vols. 1 and 3. 1836, 1838.

(6) **History of the Counties of Berks and Lebanon**—I. Daniel Rupp, 1844.

(7) **Local Historical & Biographical Notes—E. A. Weaver**—Germantown 1904.

(8) **A History of The Penna. Horticultural Society—James Boyd**—1929.

(9) **Thatsachen fuer Landwirthe**—Solon Robinson—New York 1868.

GRUMBIERE SUPP

Grumbiere Supp iss gut genunk,
Ich saag dir, die iss allfart gsund.

CHORUS

Grumbiere Supp iss gut genunk,
Wann mer aa noch Brot nei dunkt.
(To be repeated after each stanza)

Dutt mer Sals un Peffer nei,
Do soll sie aa noch besser sei.

Grumbiere Supp, un gliedich heess,
Bloss sie yuscht un sei net beess!

Wann mer sich die Zung verbrennt,
Yuscht geleffelt, frisch nei ghenkt!

Wann mer maeryets frieh uffschteht,
Grumbiere Supp wann der Haahne graeht.

Grumbiere Supp in de Middaags Schtund,
Drauss am Dierli blafft der Hund.

Oweds singt der Hawwergeess,
Weil er schunscht nichs Bessres weess.

Grumbiere Supp wann der schnee uff em Bodden iss,
Grumbiere Supp fer die kalte Fiess.

Summers hot's ken Schnee un Eis,
Kumme dann die Hawwerleis.

Grumbiere Supp un scheene Maed,
Buwe, sei mer yuscht net bleed!

Hot mer aa ken Schnitz un Gnepp,
Sauergraut un Seideschpeck.

Grumbiere Supp as die Katz driwwer laafe kann. ..
Grumbiere Supp as mer'n Hund dot schmeisse kann.

Grumbiere, Grumbiere, Grumbiere Supp,
Hopsa, Haffedeckel, schlipp, schlipp, schlupp!

Zammegebeschtelt vum JOHN BIRMELIN.

Some years ago a once well-known folksong "Grumbiere Supp" was to be sung at the annual meeting of the Grundsau Lodge Nummer Zwee an de Schibbach, Telford, Pa. Unfortunately only a few snatches of the song were remembered. These were brought to our dialect poet John Birmelin who reconstructed the song for the occasion. It appeared in the ECK for February 12, 1944. The few verses of the original song appear in bold type. Except for three stanzas with references to local personalities at the meeting of the Grundsau Lodge Nummer Zwee an de Schibbach John Birmelin's version is here reprinted as being peculiarly appropriate in this issue of the ECK which is devoted to the potato.—ED.

GRUMBEERE, GRUMBEERE

The Editor of the ECK should like to supplement Mr. Hollenbach's excellent article with some material from his own notebooks. While it may be true that the earliest German emigrant to Pennsylvania did not know the potato, those who emigrated around the middle of the 18th century had had ample opportunity to become acquainted with it. Guembel ,in a book **Die Fremdenkolonie in Billigheim** (cited in Pfaelzisches Museum-Pfaelzische Heimatkunde, Heft ½, 1926), writes that a group of Waldensians had brought into that district the potato from their own Piedmontese valleys, to which the potato had early in the 17th century found its way from the port of Genoa. It was not long before the humble tuber had taken firm root. A pastor of the Palatine village of Dahn writes (about 1722) that for the past fifty years not only **Welschkorn** but also **der Grundbirnzehnt** (a tithe or tenth part of the potato crop) had been given, which would offer proof that the potato had been grown in that part of the Palatinate as early as 1670. The same word for potatoes, **Grundbirnen,** also occurs in "Die Chronik von Hinterweidenthal" as early as 1723. In the last decades of the 18th century potato crops in the Palatinate must already have been considerable, for the distillation of liquor from the potato had assumed such proportions that the bailiwick of Lautern on Dec. 24, 1770, issued orders against it. Not only in the Palatinate but in all Germany the potato was in the course of time to take its place beside bread as the mainstay of life. But what name was to be given to this new-world tuber? Prof. Albert Becker in his interesting article "Spruech' und Lieder um die Grumbeere" (Heidelberger Beobachter, 17 Nov. 1943) points out that obviously the botanical name **Solanum tuberosum** could hardly fill the popular need. The form **Tartuffeln** borrowed from the Italian **tartufolli** (truffles) was corrupted in Switzerland into **Kartoffeln** which finally found a permanent place in High German. But at the same time two other names were taking root among the common people, **Erdapfel** (earth apple) and **Grundbirne** (ground pear) both of which were used in the Palatinate in the 18th century. In some parts of the Pfalz the form **Grundbirne** gave way to **Grumbeere,** which is today in common use there. In Mathilde Jung's cook book **Eine Landschaft kocht** the form Grumbeere is used. It is interesting to observe that while many of us here in Pennsylvania say **Grumbeere,** others say **Grumbiere,** leaning to the original **Grundbirne.**

Since the potato is so important a food crop in the Palatinate the Hausfrau there has learned to serve it in many different forms. She serves them **gequellt** or **geringelt** or **gereescht** or **gebredelt**; she serves **Grumbeerebrei** or **Grumbeerestampes** (mashed) or **Grumbeeregnebb** or **Grumbeerepannekuche.** Her family with characteristic Paelzer humor and guesto calls potatoes **Feldhinkel mit dem Karst geschossen** (quails shot with the garden hoe) or if the **Grumbeeregnebb** have not turned out quite as light as they might be they call them **Haerzdricker!** yeast dumplings with small pieces of potato they call **Sau un Schof in eem Schtall**; with good cheer they say: **Werksdags esse mer Grumbeere und Sunndags Kardoffel.** Only now and then one hears a slight note of complaint when they sing: Morjens gebbt's Grumbeeresupp/mittags were se ganz verstuppt/owends kumme se mit de Schal/is das net e Grumbeerequal?

From all this it would seem more than a mere coincidence that we Pennsylvania Germans are also unusually fond of potatoes. Diet-minded people often charge us with eating too many potatoes. Indeed in many families here they are served three times a day. Is it this love of potatoes or is it the fine shale soil (Graewwel Boddem) of Lehigh County that makes Lehigh the leading potato-growing county in Pennsylvania? Lehigh has 13,000 acres under potato cultivation with an annual yield of a little more than 2 million bushels. Some of our older readers may remember a small potato variety with a yellowish meat, which was in earlier years a great favorite. This was a German variety. We do not know whether it was originally brought over from the Palatinate. In our own generation we have often eaten it in Germany. Professor Burke of Penn State College recently informed the Editor that the "Golden" potato of Maryland was bred from this yellow German variety.—P.A.B.